

MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract : In present scenario tourism industry is gaining enormous economic benefits. It is not confined itself only to hotels, restaurants and viewing historical sight scenes, but has touched rural areas, health sector as well. The globalization of the health care sector and the massive demand for low cost high quality treatment for health in recent times has caught the attention of many developing countries like India that have the adequate resources and potential to meet these demands. The key competitive advantages of India in medical tourism stem from the following: low cost advantage, strong reputation in the advanced healthcare segment and the diversity of tourist destinations available in the country. Medical tourism or health care tourism is fast growing multibillion-dollar industry around the world. It is an economic activity that entails trade in services and represents the mixing of two of the largest world industries: medicine and tourism. India is emerging as a prime destination for health and contributing a lot towards the social-economical development of the society by enhancing employment opportunities and an increase in foreign exchange earning and helping in uplifting the living standards of the host community by developing infrastructure and high quality education system. This paper focuses on the key issues and opportunities possessed by Indian medical tourism sector that enable it to overcome domestic and international barriers on upgrading its medical services. Finally, this paper analyses and concludes the main reasons why the developing country like India attracts foreign tourists for the medical treatment.

Key words: Medical Tourism , restaurants and viewing historical .

OBJECTIVE

This study tries to get an overview of the medical tourism in India. This study explains why India has emerged as destination for medical tourism. It also explores challenges and competitive advantages and future outlook of medical tourism in India. As medical tourism becomes more attractive to many countries, there will be much more international competition and rivalry. Therefore, with medical treatment being equal across many countries, the tourists would begin to select their target destination based on other reasons. This research work also strives to understand why some developing countries like India are more successful in promoting medical tourism than others.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As this is solely a secondary based study, this study have accessed both online and print versions of various academic journals, online databases, newspapers, books and other related materials to collect data for assessing and identification of the main factors regarding the patient's perception and selection criteria by the medical tourists.

INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism is a new form of a niche tourism market which has been rapidly growing in the recent years. Medical tourism refers to patients who travels abroad in order to obtain health services where the motives for going abroad range from lower cost, higher quality, or faster treatment as well as to receive

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services those are unavailable in their country of residence. Medical tourism can be defined as a way of obtaining quality treatment in a foreign country with an affordable cost while the patient may also get the pleasure from a beautiful holiday. Traditionally, people would travel from less developed countries to major medical centers in highly developed countries for medical treatment that was unavailable in their own communities. The recent trend is for people to travel from developed countries to third world countries for medical treatments because of cost consideration, though the traditional pattern still continues.

India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30%, making it a \$2 billion industry by 2015. As medical treatment costs in the developed world balloon - with the United States leading the way - more and more Westerners are finding the prospect of international travel for medical care increasingly appealing. An estimated 150,000 of these travel to India for low-priced healthcare procedures every year.

Factors that have led to the increasing popularity of medical travel include the high cost of health care, long wait times for certain procedures, the ease and affordability of international travel, and improvements in both technology and standards of care.

ADVANTAGES

A combination of three key factors – quality, availability and cost has been key factors in fuelling the phenomenal growth witnessed in the Indian medical tourism industry. India is a leading player in the medical. It is increasingly emerging as the destination for medical tourism for a wide range of medical facilities for foreign patients.

•Expert Hospital Staff

India has a number of hospitals, large pool of doctors, nurses & supporting staff with required specialization and expertise and the language advantage servicing patients.

•Quality

Already 17 Indian hospitals have been accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI). Accreditation and compliance with quality expectations are important since they provide tourists with confidence that the services are meeting international standards.

•Technology

All medical examination and treatment are conducted using the latest technologically advanced and cutting edge diagnostic equipment. Stringent quality assurance exercises consistently ensure reliable and high quality test results in a timely manner.

•No waiting Period

Patients in USA, Britain, Canada and some other developed countries have to wait for the major surgery and sometime this waiting period is more than few months. In this respect India have almost zero waiting time for surgeries. This has resulted in attracting number of foreign patients from Britain, USA, Canada to India for their medical treatments.

MEDICAL TOURISM RISKS

Diverse standards with regards to hospitals and physicians can be a problem, as each country usually has its own licensing and certification protocols. Increased familiarity with destination country protocols is necessary, and all potential risks should be taken into account before making a final decision to travel abroad.

•Follow-Up Problems:

The follow up care is very difficult in case of patient taking treatment in India. If the patient gets any complications after surgery and is back to his own country, the follow up is not only difficult but expensive also.

•Language and Culture:

Language barriers pose major challenge in medical tourism. The country may offer expert doctors and highly sophisticated medical systems but if the doctors, nurses and other medical staff do not understand the language of the patient, the whole process becomes extremely difficult for the patient as well as the staff.

•Brain Drain:

In the countries with a pool of talented doctors and nurses like India, it is a major challenge to retain these professionals. There is shortage of such skilled professionals in most countries across the globe and thus they are offered the best salaries abroad.

•Infrastructure:

Infrastructure is a major concern affecting India as a destination. Some drawbacks include lack of proper flight connectivity to all destinations, bad roads, safe food and water availability etc.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

To tap the potential of medical tourism, Indian Government has undertaken various measures to promote India as a global health destination.

- The Indian Ministry of Tourism has started a new category of visas for medical tourists called the ‘M’ or medical visas.
- Government is taking initiatives to encourage the growth of health tourism by providing a wide variety of exemptions, incentives, lower import duties and higher depreciation rates on medical equipment as well as providing medical visa to foreign patients who are coming to India for their treatment.
- The Indian Institute of Travel and Tourism Management, Gwalior has conducted a study to focus on the problems and challenges faced by Medical tourist visiting India.

SWOT ANALYSIS ON INDIAN MEDICAL TOURISM

Strengths	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Service at Affordable Cost • Vast supply of qualified doctors • Strong presence in advanced healthcare • International Reputation of hospitals and Doctors • Diversity of tourism destinations and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No strong government support / initiative to promote medical tourism • Low Coordination between the various players in the industry • Customer Perception as an unhygienic country • No proper accreditation and regulation system for hospitals
Opportunities	Treats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased demand for healthcare services from countries with aging population. • Fast-paced lifestyle increases demand for wellness tourism and alternative cures • Shortage of supply in National Health Systems in countries like U.K, Canada • Demand from countries with underdeveloped healthcare facilities • Demand for retirement homes for elderly people especially Japanese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong competition from countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore • Lack of international accreditation • Overseas medical care not covered by insurance providers • Under-investment in health infrastructure

LITERATURE REVIEW

Medical tourism may be defined as the deliberate attempt on the part of a tourist facility (e.g. hotels) or destination to attract tourists by promoting healthcare services and facilities in addition to regular

tourist amenities. Medical tourism is a form of cost-effective private medical care for patients mostly from developed countries who need surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. Medical tourism as the combination of products and services intended to encourage patients in preserving and maintaining their health through a mixture of vacationing and other form of recreational activities in a different location other than home

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING INDIAN MEDICAL TOURISM

- The government of India must act as a regulator to institute a uniform grading and accreditation system for hospitals to build consumers' trust.
- Simplified systems of getting medical visas should be developed in order to make travel across borders smoother.
- Various added services may be offered to the patients. For example, hospitals may have kiosks at airports, offer airport pickups, bank transactions, or tie-ups with airlines for tickets and may help facilitate medical visas by the government.
- To counter increasing competition in medical tourism sector, Indian hospitals should tie-up with foreign institutions for assured supply of medical tourists.
- Cover all kinds of health insurance provided in different nations, and encourage customers to take up health insurance, as this will simplify the transaction process.

CONCLUSION

India is a developing country and a lot needs to be done before we can call ourselves as a developed country, all we can claim is to be a progressive one. The question that India will have to handle in the coming years is how to justify giving world class medical care to visitors where as it spends just 1.4 % of its GDP on medical care of its own people.

Although the situation appears to be grim there is still hope. One step at a time is all that is needed. First and foremost is to have the basic infrastructure in place such as having proper road and rail connectivity, having a good network of airports to all the major states and cities and with the countries from where the potential tourists will arrive. Secondly but more importantly there is a need to put forward the information required by the tourists. Aggressive marketing is the only way to go as seen in the case of Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia etc. Not only that there should be government authorized websites where people can get all the information regarding surgeries, hotels, cost comparison etc. They have to be developed exclusively for the medical tourism purpose.

The main idea behind doing this project was to highlight all the important features and data and give atleast a bird's eye view over the concept of tourism for medical purpose. In conclusion I can easily say that medical tourism for India is a once in a life time opportunity and we certainly need to take up on our strong points in order to become the leading nation in this area.

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